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September 10, 2013

Los Angeles City Council  
c/o Office of the City Clerk  
200 N. Spring St, Room 395

Attention: Planning and Land Use Management Committee

**Re: CF 12-1625 – Summary Report on the Working Group for the Site of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station**

To the Honorable Members of the Planning and Land Use Management Committee:

A June 25, 2013 Council motion (Alarcon/Englander) requested the formation of a Working Group to facilitate a dialogue on the appropriate commemoration and memorialization of the former site of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station, which interned US citizens of Japanese, German, Italian, and Japanese Peruvian descent during World War II. This site, located at 6433 W. La Tuna Canyon Road in Tujunga, has been in use as the Verdugo Hills Golf Course since 1960. The City Council on June 25 recognized the site's historic significance, designating a one-acre oak grove on the golf course site, which dates from the period of significance of the Detention Station use, as a City Historic-Cultural Monument.

The Department of City Planning's Office of Historic Resources (OHR) has taken a lead role in response to this motion, convening the working group and presenting here a summary of the group's deliberations and recommendations.

**Working Group Mission and Membership**

The Working Group on the Preservation, Recognition, and Interpretation of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Site (TCDS) was charged by the City Council to facilitate dialogue about the appropriate ways to commemorate the site. The goals of the working group, as stated in the Council motion, were:

- 1) To define the parameters of the location of the designated area with a minimum size of one-acre;

- 2) Facilitate a dialogue on appropriate ways to commemorate the historical and cultural significance of the site and strategies to secure resources to support the development of appropriate on-site interpretive displays, signage, markers and/or exhibits; and
- 3) Present the Working Group's findings and recommendations to the City Council within 60 days.

The working group met four times in an eight week period, chaired by Ken Bernstein, Principal City Planner and Manager of the Department of City Planning's Office of Historic Resources. The members of the working group included representatives of key Japanese-American and cultural organizations in the San Fernando Valley and citywide, as well as representatives of the local Sunland-Tujunga community:

1. Cindy Cleghorn, Sunland-Tujunga Neighborhood Council
2. Lloyd Hitt, Little Landers Historical Society
3. Joanne Kumamoto, Heart Mountain Wyoming Foundation
4. Nancy Oda, SFV Japanese American Community Center
5. James Okazaki, Little Tokyo community leader; Nisei Week Foundation
6. Marianna Gatto, Italian American Museum of Los Angeles
7. Karen Zimmerman, Sunland-Tujunga community stakeholder

Because the working group was created by Council motion, its meetings were subject to the Brown Act (Government Code section 54950); all meetings were open to the public, included participation from other community stakeholders, and provided an agenda item for public comment. The meetings also included participation from Council District Seven staff, the Department of City Planning, and representatives of Snowball West Development, the property owner and developer of the Verdugo Hills Golf Course site.

## **Background**

The site of the former Tuna Canyon Detention Station is located in Tujunga, in Council District Seven. A portion of the land was used as a work camp for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) between 1933 and 1941, as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The camp's buildings included barracks, a mess hall, and an infirmary. Shortly after the CCC vacated the property, in 1942, the Immigration and Naturalization Services reused the structures as a detention center for persons of Japanese, Italian, and German descent who were interned when the United States entered World War II. After the war, the property changed ownership several times. In 1947, Los Angeles County purchased some of the property and established a school for boys. The use of the school was granted by the City of Los Angeles requiring the school to reuse all existing buildings on-site and prohibiting any construction of new buildings. However, in 1960, all original structures were demolished to develop the Verdugo Hills Golf Course.

On October 12, 2012 former Seventh District Los Angeles City Councilmember Richard Alarcon introduced a motion, seconded by then-Councilmember Eric Garcetti, to initiate consideration of the former site of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station as a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). On February 12, 2013, the Council voted to adopt the

motion, directing the Office of Historic Resources to prepare a formal application for review by the Cultural Heritage Commission and instructing the Commission to report to City Council regarding the inclusion of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station Site in the list of HCM's.

After touring the site, Office of Historic Resources staff prepared a staff report noting the site's lack of original structures or improvements dating from the period of significance. The report recommended denial of the HCM designation, finding that the site as a whole no longer retained sufficient "integrity" to convey its very significant historic associations. At its meeting on April 18, the Cultural Heritage Commission unanimously adopted the OHR's recommendations, recommending denial of the HCM nomination. While a negative Commission recommendation would typically end the designation process, in this instance, because the designation had been initiated by the City Council, the nomination automatically proceeded to the Council.

At a June 11 meeting of the Council's Planning and Land Use Management (PLUM) Committee, many community members and government representatives voiced their strong support for the designation. Deciding that further discussions between the advocates for designation and the property owner would be beneficial, the PLUM Committee established a working group and charged it with the task of deciding the most appropriate ways to recognize the historic and cultural significance of the site. To allow the working group an opportunity to make recommendations, the HCM designation was held in committee until late July. However, when the proposed designation appeared on a full City Council agenda on June 25<sup>th</sup>, the Council unanimously approved a more limited HCM designation, including only the one-acre oak grove that remained from the camp's period of significance, and provided the revised direction on the scope of the working group, as detailed above.

### **Summary of Working Group Meetings**

The first working group meeting was held on June 26, 2013 in the Department of City Planning's Robert Janovici Rotunda Conference Room. The initial session allowed participants to clarify questions about the historic designation process and discuss some of the opportunities and options for funding a memorial. Working group members raised the issue of parking availability and public access as potential roadblocks to any memorialization of the site. As the meeting concluded, members of the working group agreed to meet separately to consolidate their visions and present a more concrete statement of their visions at the next meeting.

The second meeting, held on July 10, 2013 at the Verdugo Hills Golf Course, included a presentation by the TCDS Coalition of their vision for site interpretation, discussion of site control and ownership issues, and a walking tour of the subject property. The TCDS Coalition presented the first written draft of their vision, which included their mission statement, goals, and a ten-point vision for the memorial. The ten-point vision called for public access, adjacent parking facilities, and roadside signage. It called for an educational reflective space with a wall of incarcerated names, museum type education materials and guide posts, artwork, and a mock-up camp. The coalition also

submitted a draft wording for the message on the Historic-Cultural Monument plaque, written by working group member Joanne Kumamoto.

The working group toured the golf course property to help determine where the commemorative space should be located. Areas outside of the HCM boundaries were raised as potential sites for constructing public art or interpretative posts. Architect Janek Dombrowa, representing the owner, suggested creating a trail, marked by interpretative outlook posts, on the hill surrounding and overlooking the future housing development. However, several working group members opposed the trail option, arguing that steep hill is too detached from the historical site and inaccessible to elderly visitors. Most working group members agreed that the primary space for the memorial should be on the property where the internment camp stood.

The third meeting, held at the North Valley Neighborhood City Hall on July 24, 2013, addressed issues of site control, public access, and funding. The TCDS Coalition opened the meeting by presenting an updated draft for the plaque text. A member of the TCDS Coalition also presented examples of other memorials that could inspire the development of the TCDS memorial. Volunteers Organized in Conserving the Environment (V.O.I.C.E.) presented a summary of a regional park proposal, seen as an alternative to the residential development of the property. The new version of this plan incorporates components of the TCDS vision into a proposed park that would use City Proposition O money and other potential public funds to purchase the entire property, with a cost at \$34 million, including \$15 million for land acquisition. Under this proposal, the site would be turned into a comprehensive storm water treatment and filtration aquifer with a nine-hole golf course. Some working group members questioned the feasibility of the park plan and whether it was an appropriate use of a historically sensitive site. The working group agreed to focus on more immediate memorialization in the following session. Mr. Dombrowa confirmed that he would work with the project team to revise the plan to include public access to the oak grove.

The final working group meeting was held on August 7, 2013 in the Biscailuz Building at El Pueblo. Department of City Planning staff presented a more detailed site plan of the camp in the 1940s, recently unearthed from an original case file, providing a clearer overlay of the HCM boundary with the site's historic use. Mr. Dombrowa and Fred Gaines of Gaines and Stacey LLP, presented a plan that would permit public access to the oak grove via a four-car parking lot and path leading to the grove. While some working group members expressed concerns that the proposed parking lot would be too small for the anticipated size of visitor groups, others pointed out that additional parking could be provided at the perimeter of the property or along adjacent streets. Working group members were pleased with the overall plan and felt that a general consensus had been reached with the development team. However, at the close of the final meeting, Mr. Gaines announced that the owner of the property had filed a lawsuit against the City of Los Angeles contesting the HCM designation.

### **Vision Statement**

Throughout the working group's sessions, it became clear that the TCDS Coalition envisions a more extensive memorialization project than the standard City HCM plaque.

Although the working group provided the space for participants to brainstorm such projects, which would be carried out past the term of the working group itself, the main goals of the sessions were to discuss immediate commemoration details (i.e. plaque text, location, accessibility). Nevertheless, at the final meeting, the working group had achieved an apparent consensus around the following mission, goals, and vision statement consisting of eight points, which the TCDS Coalition listed in order of priority:

### Mission

To preserve the stories of the Japanese, Germans, Italians, Japanese Peruvians, and others at the Tuna Canyon Detention Station, which was operated by the U.S. Department of Justice during World War II, and was located in the City Of Los Angeles.

### Our Goals

- To create a welcoming gathering place for people of all ages and origins, especially student groups, that explores the entire history of the Tuna Canyon Detention Station (TCDS) site.
- To establish a dynamic, emotionally engaging, living memorial for the individuals—Japanese, Italian and German immigrants, Japanese Peruvians and others—whose civil liberties were violated at TCDS.
- To present educational programming that connects the site's history with contemporary life, serves as a somber reminder of the fragility of our democracy, and ensures its relevance for future generations.
- To create an inspirational setting for those detained at the TCDS and their families and give all visitors an opportunity to reflect on the profound significance of the site.
- To construct a well-planned site that ensures access to all people.

### Our Vision for the Memorial

1. There will be public access with directly adjacent parking facilities, and amenities for the disabled.
2. It will be located on the site the City of Los Angeles designated as a Historic Cultural Monument commemorating the internment in 1941-1943 and will include a plaque designating the site's history.
3. It will be an educational place with interpretive stations where people from the City of Los Angeles and the world will be able to make an emotional connection with the TCDS under the canopy of the sycamore and oak trees.
4. There will be a wall with the names of the people who were incarcerated in a setting of a Japanese garden as a place for reflection.
5. There will be an area where the public may find stories of those people as well as other museum-type educational materials and guide posts.
6. There will be representational and inspirational artwork to assist in reflection of what occurred at the Camp and to promote healing and understanding.
7. There will be a mock-up of the camp to remind visitors of the conditions of that era.
8. There will be roadside signage to indicate its historical and cultural importance.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

The working group ultimately concluded that the site plan proposed by the project team would successfully meet most of the eight-point vision detailed above: a publicly-accessible memorial located within the designated oak grove would be feasible, even within the context of a proposed residential project on the site. The one-acre HCM site would allow for an expanded historical marker, interpretive stations and displays, and additional educational materials, all along a path through the grove, leading from a small public parking area (see attached site plan).

The TCDS Coalition will continue planning the memorial and several working group members requested that the City Council and development team continue collaboration with the coalition following the formal conclusion of the working group.

The working group successfully achieved the following objectives:

- 1) Consensus on the one-acre Historic-Cultural Monument site located in the designated oak grove as the focal point for commemoration and memorialization of the site's history;

- 2) Consensus on how to achieve public access to the memorial and interpretive content on the site;

- 3) Plans for more immediate memorialization of the property by providing for a marker, to be larger than the standard Historic-Cultural Monument plaque, detailing the site's historic significance; and

- 4) Preliminary ideas and plans for a more extensive memorial project, subject to continued discussions between the property owner, local community stakeholders, Japanese American cultural leaders, and Council District Seven.

The Office of Historic Resources will continue to offer its assistance to Council District Seven and the diverse community stakeholders to assist in bringing to fruition the commemoration of this important historic site.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL J. LoGRANDE  
Director of Planning



KEN BERNSTEIN, AICP  
Principal City Planner and Manager, Office of Historic Resources

